

AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION:

Please amend the paragraph beginning at line 6 on page 16 as follows:

It can be shown (e.g., referring to polarity theory literature, such as the text book titled Integer Programming and Combinatorial Optimization by Nemhauser and Wolsey (John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1988), the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference) that the polytope P (defined as a bounded polyhedron) shrinks "strictly" in Step 2 of each iteration in such a way that in each iteration a new optimal solution with a strictly better objective function value is generated. This monotonic behavior leads to the finite convergence of the above described Procedure *Global*, as shown in the iterative process shown in Figure 5.